

1987

Apology

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APOLOGY

The sick watercolor ducks
on the wall would also be gone
if they had some place to go,
if they had not lost themselves
in too much too blue sky.
My bathwater turning colder,
I watch them and complain.
Mother pours another hot potful in.
What poverty can this be? Food
and wood enough for winter,
maples turning everywhere
in the yard of an uncle's summer
cottage. I am still too young
to understand. Grandmother puts on
another sweater, bangs another pot
onto its hook, says she knew
any deal like that
would end like this.
Beside my big round tub
mother's words mist and lift
into the cool air I must soon
reenter. But for now I am no one.
Barely six. Tomorrow I'll say
my vowels finally right. And tomorrow,
my sister is sure, even the cold water pipes
will freeze. I sink deeper,
making the room go quiet.
Just my eyes and the top of my head
bob on the edge
of an incredibly warm world.
Across the kitchen women's shadows
drift, their breaths barely seen,
gone. And then father and his shadow
step forward, and behind him
the little clouds of his words,
so familiar—one, then
the other—I'm sorry.